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ABSTRACT

Recent trends indicate that the traditional pattern of South to North migration has shifted toward a counterstream movement back to the South. This trend has been particularly characteristic of Southern blacks. To examine this development, data on a sample of blacks in the 1970 United States census were analyzed by comparing individual and socioeconomic characteristics of southern black nonmigrants (persons who resided in the South during 1965-70), return migrants (those who migrated North and lived there in 1965 but returned South and became residents as of 1970), and nonreturn migrants (those who migrated North and remained residents through 1970). The study found that among Southern blacks: 1) return migrants were generally younger than nonmigrants and nonreturn migrants; 2)migrants had higher educational levels than nonmigrants; 3) return migrants had lower employment levels than nonmigrants; and 4) nonreturn migrants had the highest average income, while return migrants had lower incomes than nonmigrants. The unexpectedly lower socioeconomic levels of return migrants compared to nonmigrants (considering educational attainments) did not support the prevailing assumption that investments in education and migration are expected to raise earnings and suggested that return migrants do not behave according to the "rational model" postulated by economists. (Author/MJL)

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A RESEARCH NOTE

RETURN MIGRATION AND STATUS ATTAINMENT AMONG SOUTHERN BLACKS

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ABSTRACT

This study contrasts three migrant classifications—return, non-return, and nonmigrant (those remaining in the South)—to determine the degree of status attainment resulting from participation (or non-participation) in the migration process. Analysis of data from the one-per-thousand Public Use Samples of the 1970 Census indicates that levels of status attainment are directly dependent upon specific selectivity factors such as age. Also indicated are implications of differentials among each migrant classification on education, employment, and income. Results suggest that movement for the purpose of economic improvement has proved to be ineffective for black return migrants. They have been unable to successfully acquire the economic amenities reportedly obtained as the result of migratory movement.

A RESEARCH NOTE

RETURN MIGRATION AND STATUS ATTAINMENT AMONG SOUTHERN BLACKS

Introduction

In 1970 a noticeable shift in the traditional North-South migration flow was discovered (Beale, 1975; Long and Hansen, 1975). It appeared that the mass flow of southerners to urban centers of the Northeast and West during the 1950's and 1960's was beginning to filter back into the South.

Although counterstream migration is not a new phenomenon, only limited attention has been given such movements (cf. Campbell and Johnson, 1976). Two reasons can be cited for this neglect--first was the small numbers involved, and second, the trend was thought to be associated with specific economic circumstances. For instance, it was not uncommon for persons living in urban centers to return to rural settings during times of economic crisis or after acquiring sufficient capital in the cities to return home.

Of particular interest in this return migration trend, however, has been the participation of southern blacks. Although blacks have traditionally participated in the migration process, historically they have been inhibited about returning South. The primary reasons for these inhibitions were the lack of economic development in the region, and continuing racial discrimination. Interestingly, however, the 1970 census revealed an increase in the number of blacks returning South (Long and Hansen, 1977).

Various factors have been associated with this urban turnaround, for instance: social ties of the migrants to the southern locations (Campbell and Johnson, 1976); changes in residential preferences (Zuiches, 1970;

Zuiches and Fuguitt, 1975; Kirschenbaum, 1972; and Hansen, 1973); the acquisition of better standards of living or increased amenities (Gibson, 1969; Liu, 1975; Marans and Wellman, 1978); increased economic opportunities, because of increased industrial and manufacturing growth (McCarthy and Morrison, 1978); the development of retirement and recreational facilities in the South (Beale, 1975); and to some extent, the association of military and educational institutions located in Southern regions (Long, 1976). But in spite of this list of factors, there has been no conclusive evidence which supports any one reason in particular.

In addressing this informational void, this paper will focus on three classifications of black southern migrants: nonmigrants, return migrants, and nonreturn migrants. Moreover, the socioeconomic characteristics of each group will be investigated. These are essential in comprehending migration movement between regions, and will provide some awareness of the impact of the move for the migrants.

By incorporating a nonreturn migrant group and using a southern locational perspective, this study differs from existing migration research. This supplemental classification and directional change critically reexamines and updates present conceptualizations of return migration, many of which are not supported by the current reverse trend. One such conceptualization is that of Lansing and Mueller (1967), which suggests that the return migrants' decision to move is primarily based on economic/employment related factors.

In view of the above, the purpose of this paper is threefold: (1) to provide additional insight into the traditional concepts associated with migration counterstreams; (2) to resolve ambiguities as to the type of

person participating in the counterstream; and (3) to examine the socio-economic characteristics of the three migrant groups and determine what effect they have on status attainment of persons participating in the migration process.[1]

Data and Method

The analysis is based upon data secured from the one-per-thousand sample of the 1970 Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1972). The sample is representative of the total U.S. population. For this study, only the residential location of blacks 15 years of age and older who were born in the South is examined. The children (second and third generation) of Southern blacks who had migrated in earlier periods are excluded; these persons were not considered to be of Southern origin.[2] The sample size is accordingly reduced to 10,016 persons.

The three migrant classifications are analyzed with the variables age, education, employment, income and region of residence in 1970. In this analysis, nonmigrant refers to persons who resided in the South in the 1965-70 period. Return migrants is that group which, after migrating North and residing there in 1965, returned South and became residents as of 1970. The nonreturn migrants then, are those who migrated North and remained residents through 1970.

Age selectivity is viewed here as a causative factor in both motivating and initiating migration returns; therefore age is controlled for in examining the educational, employment, and economic attainments of the migrants. Further, age appears to be a major contributor to the status-attainment process, by contributing to socioeconomic changes obtained by

the migrants and, as a result, acts as the basis of influence forthe other migratory factors.

The sex variable was not included in this study. It was originally speculated that sex could be a critical factor in the studies of return migration, that females might be more likely to return than males. However, a preliminary analysis revealed that the sex differences among the three migrant types were not statistically significant. The sex ratio was 85 percent among nonmigrants, 90 percent among return migrants, and 93 percent among nonreturn migrants. Thus, it was decided for the sake of research expediency to exclude the sex variable.

Simple contingency tabulations are used to delineate the covariations between status variables (education, employment, and income) and the three migrant types. Education is measured by the years of schooling, employment by the work status (with or without jobs), and income by the total amount of earnings and other sources of payments. The human capital perspective is applied in this study to assess how return migration is related to the process of status attainment.

Age Selectivity of Migration

The significance of age selectivity in the migration process has been a focus of interest as early as 1938, notably in a study by Dorothy Thomas (1938). This interest has resulted in a voluminous body of theory articulating pertinent information on the act of migrating and the types of persons most likely to move.

As expected, migrants' age selectivity has some distinctly confounding effects on the relationship between migration type and status attainment.

For instance, if return migrants have a much lower median age, then we may expect them to have a higher rate of unemployment, and/or lower levels of economic status. For this reason, it is imperative that age is controlled for in the evaluation of migration and status attainment.

Support of age selectivity in return migration can be found in Table 1, where among the various age groups, return migrants had the largest percentage of the 15-34 age group, with a median age of 32.0. It should also be noted that it was from this age range that the bulk of persons migrating from south to north in previous periods emerged. The nonmigrant group, with a media age of 38.0, had its highest percentage in the 35-65 age group. Nonreturn migrants, in contrast, had a median age of 42.3. This is not entirely unexpected, since it can be assumed that those persons residing in the Northeast region have established careers and family ties, thus making migration a risk to their investments.

The lesser degree of movement in the older age group (65+) further supports the selectivity of young adults, and even more importantly aids in disclaiming the suggestion that a major aspect of return migration is the movement of retired and elderly persons. This finding is interesting in light of Eldridge's (1964) observation that return migrants are generally expected to have a higher median age than other types of migration participants. Given the 1970 census data, we cannot concur with Eldridge's conclusion that return migrants tend to be predominantly older than other types of migrants.

Table 1. Age Distribution by Migration Status

Age	Non-Migrants	Return Migrants	Non-Return Migrants	Total
15-24	29.4	34.6	15.0	25.4
25-34	16.2	22.1	20.4	17.7
35-44	14.5	11.2	19.4	15.8
45-54	14.6	12.2	18.4	15.7
55-64	12.0	8.3	14.5	12.6
65 +	13.3	11.5	11.9	12.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(6,602)	(384)	(3,030)	(10,016)

Educational Attainment

Migration theory in respect to education and migratory movement has essentially suggested that those migrating from a region have a higher median education than those remaining in the region (Shryock and Nam, 1965). Findings from this study would tend to support this conclusion. Indications are, that nonreturn migrants have higher average years of schooling as compared to the other migrant groups. This is not a surprising finding, given the fact that these persons represent the educationally select from the preceding rural/urban migration flow.

In contrast, return migrants had the lowest average years of schooling. This low average is attributed to the fact that a substantial number of these migrants are in the 15-24 age group and younger, a factor which would suggest that many of these persons have not completed their education.

Additionally, the number of children participating in the return trend accounts for the proximity in the average years of schooling for the return and nonmigrants (Long and Hansen, 1975). Further explanation for this proximity, from the nonmigrant perspective, may lie in the improvements in the southern educational systems during the last two decades, which have enabled southern blacks to obtain higher levels of education.

Table 2. Average Years of Schooling by Age and Migration Status

Age	Non-Migrants	Return Migrants	Non-Return Migrants	Total
15-24	10.6 (1941)	9.5 (133)	11.2 (470)	10.7 (2544)
25-34	10.4 (1069)	9.8 (85)	11.5 (617)	10.8 (1771)
35-44	9.6 (955)	9.0 (43)	10.7 (587)	10.0 (1585)
45-54	7.8 (964)	7.6 (47)	9.3 (557)	8.4 (1568)
55-64	6.9 (692)	6.9 (32)	8.3 (439)	7.4 (1263)
65 +	5.6 (881)	5.3 (44)	6.6 (360)	5.9 (1285)
Total	8.9 (6602)	8.6 (384)	9.9 (3030)	9.2 (10016)

Note: Figures in parentheses represent the sample size.

Employment Attainment

One of the primary functions of migration may be economic improvement through employment for the migrant. This has particularly been the

case for Southern blacks migrating North (Davis and Donaldson, 1975). However, one question tends to surface following these observations: To what extent, if any, does return migration actually lead to improved employment opportunities?

According to Table 3, there appears to be some validity in the idea of improved employment opportunities, but not to any significant degree. Of the migrant groups, it appears that nonreturn migrants were best able to realize employment opportunities. The level of employment, 5.6 percent, for nonreturn migrants paints an interesting picture. Specifically, these are the persons who seem to have acquired secure employment in the Northern region and were not willing to risk relocation in the South because of possible greater advantages in their current location.

Additional conclusions can be drawn from Table 3 on the employment differentials. A low proportion of employed return migrants is indicated, particularly in the 15-24 and 65+ age groups. The low percentage for the 15-24 age group supports the argument that black return migrants are predominantly unemployed or not in the labor force, while the low level for the 65+ age group dispels the belief that return migration includes a large proportion of retired persons moving South.

Having controlled for age, returnees still have a lower employment rate. One explanation is that a substantial percentage of those persons included in the return trend might be participating in activities and acquiring income through means other than employment, as in the case of students, military personnel and the retired population, who might be receiving subsidies from public agencies or from parents at home.

Table 3. Percent Working by Age and Migration Status

Age	Non-Migrants	Return Migrants	Non-Return Migrants	Total
15-24	36.4 (1941)	26.3 (133)	45.1 (470)	37.5 (2544)
25-34	67.8 (1069)	55.3 (85)	64.3 (617)	66.0 (1771)
35-44	73.0 (955)	55.8 (43)	68.0 (587)	70.7 (1585)
45-54	66.8 (964)	63.8 (47)	70.6 (557)	68.0 (1568)
55-64	55.7 (792)	25.0 (32)	58.5 (439)	55.9 (1263)
65 +	18.3 (881)	9.1 (44)	17.8 (360)	17.8 (1285)
Total	51.1 (6602)	38.5 (384)	56.8 (3030)	52.4 (10016)

Economic Attainment

In the study of migration movement for employment, evidence suggests that migratory flows move from low to high income areas (Bunting, 1961). However, as Lansing and Mueller (1967) found, there is little evidence to support the conclusion that incomes are higher once differences in occupation and residential location are taken into account.

Despite the fact that migrants generally have higher levels of education than nonmigrants, a factor important in contributing to attained income,

the census data appear to show that return migrants have lower incomes than the other migrant groups. Return migrants appear to have less success in transforming their education into income as compared to nonreturn migrants. Previously, Long and Hansen (1977) offered the explanation that because recent migrants initially have lower seniority in jobs, they may experience a period of lower earnings, but subsequently they would earn higher incomes than nonmigrants. Does this generalization still hold when the years of work experience are controlled for? Let us examine this hypothesis.

Table 4 shows both expected and unexpected results. Unexpected is the slightly higher income average for nonmigrants as compared to return migrants. Specific variations are also observed among age groups. The average income for return migrants 15-44 years of age is only slightly higher than that of nonmigrants, while the income for those return migrants beyond 45 years of age declines rather abruptly, more so than the other migrant groups. The drop in income from ages 45 to 65+ can, to some extent, be the result of those retired persons on fixed incomes participating in the return trend. For those migrants 15 to 44 years of age, we again point out that many of these people in actuality are not in the labor force and therefore are not earning incomes. Clearly, return migrants have somewhat lower incomes than both nomigrants or nonreturn migrants. It also appears that return migrants are less successful than the other two migrant groups in transforming their education into economic status.

Table 4 also shows an expected result. The average income level of nonreturn migrants is higher than that of nonmigrants and return migrants. This difference can be attributed to the variation in income levels between the Northern and Southern regions, and the inclusion of elements such as

Table 4. Average Income by Age and Migration Status

Age	Non-Migrants	Return Migrants	Non-Return Migrants	Total
15-24	1,073	1,087	1,971	1,240
25-34	3,032	3,426	4,351	3,511
35-44	3,100	3,346	4,438	3,602
45-54	2,979	2,408	4,504	3,504
55-64	2,268	1,459	3,897	2,813
65 +	1,311	816	1,828	1,439
Total	2,137	2,019	3,661	2,593

rank or seniority within an occupation. In essence, the question of economic improvement as the result of northward migration can be addressed by stating that migration does provide an increase in economic opportunities, when compared to nomigrants remaining in the South. However, these improvements diminish as age increases.

A Summative Analysis

Presented in Table 5 are results of a regression analysis relating income with education and work experience for the three migrant groups. The model is specified according to the human capital theory as follows:

$$LN\ y = a + b_1 x_1 + b_2 x_2 \qquad (1)$$

where y is income, x_1 years of schooling, x_2 age beyond 18 (assuming that is the initial age at which one becomes eligible for employment), LN the

base of logarithm, and a, b_1 and b_2 the coefficients. It can be shown mathematically from Equation (1) that:

$$b_i = \frac{1}{y} \frac{dy}{dx_i}$$

where d is the sign of partial derivative. In other words, the regression coefficient represents the percentage increase of annual income due to an independent variable, x_i.

The regression results presented in Table 5 culminate this paper's analyses. All variables discussed in previous sections are taken into consideration: age, education, employment, occupation, income, and migration status. Regression coefficients of income with education and work experience are obtained for each of the three migrant groups and for similar occupational attainment.

The finding from this analysis indicates that the education of return migrants yields a much smaller payoff than that of nonmigrants or non-return migrants, when all other variables are controlled. For instance, among the white-collar workers, the increase of one year of schooling is expected to increase annual income by 3.8 percent for return migrants, 13.0 percent for nonmigrants, and 13.8 percent for nonreturn migrants. Interestingly, however, the years of schooling seem to have little bearing on the amount of annual income received within the return migrant group; the regression coefficient is not significant. That is to say, education can hardly be regarded as a form of human capital investment. This finding appears to challenge the prevailing assumption in human capital theory that most investments from education, on-the-job training or migration are expected to raise observed earnings (Becker, 1964). It is quite likely that the behavioral pattern

Table 5. Regression Analysis of Income with Education and Work Experience by Occupation and Migration Status

Independent Variable	Non-Migrants	Return Migrants	Non-Return Migrants
White-Collar Workers			
Education	0.1303 (0.0147)	0.0379 (0.0619)	0.1383 (0.0219)
Work Experience	0.0301 (0.0031)	0.0461 (0.0195)	0.0243 (0.0041)
Constant	0.9648	1.9229	1.1244
R	0.3773	0.3400	0.3048
N	829	47	589
Manual Workers			
Education	0.0653 (0.0081)	-0.0037 (0.0324)	0.0732 (0.0139)
Work Experience	0.0126 (0.0015)	-0.0026 (0.0073)	0.0626 (0.0025)
Constant	0.7049	2.4650	2.3463
R	0.1452	0.0268	0.1279
N	3,893	184	1,721

NOTE: Sample (N) for this table includes only the employed job-holders. Figures in parentheses denote standard errors of regression coefficients.

of return migrants does not strictly follow the so-called "rational model" as postulated by economists.

On the other hand, return migration seems to facilitate the financial rewards of work experience among those who have white-collar jobs. The increase of one year of work experience is expected to increase annual income

by 4.6 percent for return migrants, but only 3.0 percent for nonmigrants and 2.4 percent for nonreturn migrants. Consequently, the Census data reveal that return to place of origin may facilitate the economic pay-offs of work experience for those who are in white-collar occupational pursuits. An experienced worker is expected to have a better chance of financial success as a return migrant than as a nonmigrant or a nonreturn migrant. The reason may partly be related to the fact that return migrants can combine their experience with social networks not available to new in-migrants.

Table 5 also permits a comparison of returns to income from human capital investments between nonmigrants in the South and nonreturn migrants in the North. Given the fact that the average income level in the North is higher than that in the South, we would assume that the returns on education are higher also for nonreturn migrants residing in the North than for nonmigrants residing in the South. However, the findings indicate a non-significant difference between nonmigrants and nonreturn migrants in income, when both groups are in similar occupations. For example, among white-collar workers, the rate of return to educational investments is 13.0 percent for nonmigrants and 13.8 percent for nonreturn migrants.

Contradictions such as this, raise critical questions in regard to regional economic differences between American blacks. If our observation is valid, the prevailing assumption that Northern black migrants have better economic opportunities than Southern blacks, may be called to question. This point is particularly evident when the occupational variable is controlled, because it is then that the relative advantages of Northern black migrants tend to be diminished.

Summary

In an attempt to broaden the scope of inquiry into the black migration process, this study has controlled for the age variable and focused on analyzing the South as the point of departure. By incorporating these aspects, the study embodies a twofold significance. It has provided further documentation of current reverse migration research, and more importantly it has lent to the demand for much needed research in return migration.

Several pertinent conclusions were found after investigating the relationship between status attainment and migration. They are summarized as follows:

First, return migrants among blacks tend to be younger than nonmigrants and nonreturn migrants, contrary to previous findings reported by Eldridge (1964). Further indications suggest that return migration is not a movement involving large numbers of retired persons, but appears to consist mostly of young adults.

Second, from an educational perspective, further substantiation was made in regard to migrants having a higher educational attainment than nonmigrants. Of the three groups, nonreturn migrants appear to have the highest educational level. Return migrants, on the other hand, indicated lower levels of education, which might be attributed to the age diversity of the participants.

Third, return migrants also have a lower level of employment, possibly due to a lower percentage of persons in the labor force because of other activities such as the military, school and retirement. Even with the age factor controlled, however, return migrants still have lower labor force participation rates.

Finally, in regard to migration as an investment in human capital, it appears that return migrants were unable to transform their educations into higher incomes. Return migrants unexpectedly had a lower average income than the nonmigrants in the South. This finding seems to challenge the prevailing assumption that most investments from education and migration are expected to raise observed earnings. It is speculated that the behavioral motivation of return migrants may not strictly follow the so-called "rational model" as economists postulated.

NOTES

1. Status attainment as used in the context of this paper, refers to achieving a positive transition in one's social and economic standing as the result of migratory movement.
2. The definition of "South," refers to the South Atlantic, East South Central and West South Central regions, not only the area considered the "Deep South." Specific states include: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. Those non-South states are defined as "North."

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